

Wayne P. Harris

Candidate for Rochester City Council

East District

- Name one issue on which you disagree with the current administration and why.

The primary issue I disagree with the current administration on is the push for the Police Accountability Board.

Fundamentally, I disagree with the City's proposal because it is punitively based with very little thought or voice given to mutual growth, cooperation and understanding.

After a career spanning over thirty years in law enforcement, one fact remains painfully clear. People do not have a clear understanding of policing. They believe they do as a result of the things they have read or experienced through the variety of media programming that gives a warped impression of law enforcement. Their ignorance, however, is not solely attributable to the misguiding depiction of policing they have been exposed to. Rather it is the fault of the law enforcement industry that has failed to educate the communities they serve on their practices, their procedures, and the countless years, research, mistakes and learning that have gone into their development.

If we have any hope of addressing the rising concern of police misconduct, we must erase the ignorance gap that exists between us. We must be willing to dive deeply into our history and honestly discuss the role policing has played in our communities. These conversations will be difficult and often painful as they will require police to more fully understand the communities they serve, and the communities to see past the uniform and embrace the human beings inside.

- What is the most important issue facing your district, and what is a specific proposal or action you propose to address it?

The East District is the most diverse in the city. We have the greatest wealth and some of the poorest neighborhoods, so it is difficult to identify only one important issue facing the district. However, the one issue that does impact the entire district is our failing school district. Without question, it has been the primary concern of the residents I have spoken to during this campaign. From families planning to move from the city when their child or children become school aged, to the family that has chosen to home school their children while one parent goes back to college seeking a doctorate degree to help better understand the problem and work to develop solutions, our educational system is the primary concern in the East District.

I believe it is important to put this matter into its proper context. Our school district's failure is not just happening today but has been going on for decades. It has contributed to our City's unacceptable poverty and the ancillary issues that arise in poverty-stricken areas. Concerns such as higher rates of crime (often violent), poor health, declining home values and poor education are just a few of the issues associated with poverty. Research has shown that they are not exclusive to areas directly impacted, but rather they are impactful to whole communities in general.

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/report/overview-community-characteristics-areasconcentrated-poverty/residents-high-poverty-neighborhoods-experiencenegative-effects-their-surroundings-not-just-those-who-are-impooverished>

I propose we begin to recognize and focus on the generational nature of this problem and cease thinking only in terms of today. I applaud Mayor Warren's willingness to address our school district's failure and encourage us to make it our number one priority. We must consider the

interconnectivity and realize that changing the course of our school district will significantly contribute to positively addressing many quality of life issues in our city neighborhoods.

- Please identify one area in the city budget where you think the city should commit more resources than is currently proposed and why.

I would significantly increase the money we provide to the school district, but I would earmark the budget increase to fund adult education programs. We must address the impact decades of failure have wrought on our community, and we must help our families help themselves. If we can educate adults that grew up in a failing system and teach them proper study skills, they can pass those skills onto their children and increase their level of performance in school.

- What policies would you pursue to address housing affordability, evictions and/or landlord-tenant relations in your district?

With poverty being the most pressing matter facing the Rochester community, it is necessary that we develop strategies that will alleviate the economic burden some of our neighbors are facing. Maintaining affordable housing will significantly enhance the chances of our neighbors who are struggling with poverty to improve their economic status. Rent control can contribute to making housing affordable and, in the case of some of the housing developments currently under construction, will ensure that they remain affordable as well.

This is a conversation that must consider all perspectives. We must consider the perspectives of those in our community who struggle economically with unacceptable levels of poverty as well as the perspective of property owners who have invested in Rochester's housing market. Expecting that operational costs change and that housing

costs increase, rent control can include proportional increases with a cap to maintain affordability.

I believe it is also necessary to address our city's housing standards. We must decide what acceptable housing in the City of Rochester looks like and begin to hold property owners accountable for the physical state of their holdings. I propose we strengthen our points assessment program and aggressively pursue owners who do not provide safe, structurally sound and environmentally friendly housing to citizens seeking to rent from them.

Finally, I propose we explore relationships with mortgage lenders to provide funding at reduced interest rates for families who are financially able to bear the responsibility of financing a mortgage. Multiple mortgage lenders involved in such a program will give our families a variety of banking institutes to select from and could ultimately help begin the process of credit growth.

- Will you vote for the Police Accountability Board as proposed in November – why or why not?

I will not vote for the Police Accountability Board as proposed by City Council. According to some members of our community, to include some of my opponents, this is the most important issue facing the city. And while I agree that it is significant, I do not share in that belief. In my opinion, our city's level of poverty and our failed city school district are far more significant and should be our immediate focus.

It is appropriate for our community to require accountability for the actions and performance of the Rochester Police Department. As a command officer, I set that expectation with the officers under my command, and I consistently informed residents that I was accountable to them whenever I found myself giving a public address. And since there are high expectations on our police department, and with our officers being held to a higher standard, the establishment of some form of a Police Accountability Board is reasonable.

With that said, please let me explain why I do not support Council's proposal. As a retired law enforcement professional that has risen to an executive leadership position, and as a national executive board member of one of the foremost law enforcement organizations in the country (NOBLE), I have extensive experience working on best practices for the law enforcement industry. Those best practices include building trust and legitimacy between a police department and the community it serves.

Trust can only be established through honest interaction and is essential to the concept of community policing. Unfortunately, I feel that the proposal as written is punitive in nature and does little to foster the spirit of cooperation and collaboration that is necessary to successfully serve a community. I believe an Accountability Board should give voice to our community's expectation of the Rochester Police Department, but it should be a constructive partnership made up of all aspects of the Rochester community with a representative from the various neighborhoods throughout the city as well as someone with a law enforcement background. This will ensure that all perspectives are heard when determining whether a police officer's behavior amounts to misconduct.

Furthermore, I would caution Council against removing the responsibility of discipline from the Police Chief. Anyone holding the top position of a police agency is ultimately responsible for the performance of the department. The chief must set the expectations of performance for the men and women who serve the city and foster the spirit of community policing in all functions of the department.

If the police department does not meet the expectations of our community, the chief of police should be held accountable. The chief should be given the opportunity to identify the cause of the poor performance, confer with representatives of the Rochester community and devise strategies to correct the situation. If the police department continues to fall short of our expectations, the police chief should be removed from office

and replaced with someone who can provide the leadership our community requires. And, since the position of police chief is an appointed position and not protected by a collective bargaining agreement, the removal of a police chief can be swift allowing for our city to quickly change the direction of our law enforcement agency.

An Accountability Board should also focus on educating the community on the intricacies of the law enforcement industry. This would provide an accurate and full understanding of law enforcement which would contribute to the relationship necessary for our community's health.

Additionally, I encourage Council to consider who we will hold accountable if further misconduct continues or if the department does not perform to community standards. Would we hold the Police Accountability Board responsible?

Finally, I recommend Council review the 2015 Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing and adopt as many of the report's recommendations as is deemed necessary to ensure the City of Rochester is properly served by the Rochester Police Department.

<http://elearningcourses.net/iacp/html/webinarResources/170926/FinalReport21stCenturyPolicing.pdf>

- Do you support Mayor Warren's push for a referendum calling for removal of the elected school board in favor of a state takeover of RCSD/appointed board, and why?

I do support the Mayor's push for a referendum for several reasons. First, as in all matters pertaining to the welfare of the citizens of our city, I will always support hearing directly from voters. I believe it is critically important for the voice of Rochester to be included in matters of significant importance. Second, our school district has failed our families for generations. Except for the few examples of excellence in the district (SOTA, World of Inquiry, #17 school), this district has not fostered an environment of learning. We have gone

through five superintendents in five years, and our board has not been overly successful in turning the situation around.

I believe a different approach and perspective is needed in Rochester. I believe we need to recognize this matter as a generational concern that has significantly contributed to the level of poverty in our community. It is the single biggest concern residents want to talk about as I walk through the neighborhoods.

I propose we begin to address our challenged school district by changing our focus from how many children we graduate to how well we are preparing our children to excel in whatever secondary education they desire. I then propose we establish an Educational Excellence committee which would have oversight of the Mayor's Office of Educational Initiatives and serve as the liaison to the Rochester City School District and the areas charter schools. This initiative would be funded by the \$118,000,000 we are mandated by the state to contribute to the school district budget (*editor's note: the amount was fixed at \$119.1 million in 2007*), and it would include an extensive adult education component. We must strengthen our families if we hope to fully prepare our students for the future.

I am encouraged by our Mayor's determination to bring change to our school district, and I feel, at this juncture, a state intervention is warranted.

- What current policy or practice of city government would you seek to change if (re)elected, and why?

When elected, I will propose examining our fine scheduling for property code violations, and if deemed reasonable, recommend we double the current scheduling to reflect a more aggressive approach to abate property code violations. We must set a high standard for housing in the City of Rochester and hold property owners accountable for failing to maintain those standards.